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SUBJECT: CODEL WEXLER DISCUSSIONS ON ANTI-SEMITISM, DANISH
CARTOONS WITH OSCE, AUSTRIANS

Classified By: DCM Scott Kilner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) Congressman Robert Wexler (D-Florida) visited Vienna February 22-23 to meet with Austrian and OSCE officials on a variety of topics, including religious tolerance and the controversy over cartoons depicting Mohammed in Danish newspapers with Austrian and OSCE officials. Septels report Cong. Wexler's discussions on Hamas and on Iran.

Meetings at OSCE

2. (U) Congressman Wexler met with Gert Weisskirchen, a German parliamentarian and the OSCE Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism, and Kathrin Meyer, Adviser on Anti-Semitism Issues for the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), at OSCE offices on February 23.

3. (SBU) Topics included recent anti-Semitic incidents in France, ODIHR's education and civil society development activities, and the controversy over caricatures of the prophet Mohammed. Weisskirchen noted his and the ODIHR's excellent working relationship with French government officials, who have shown their willingness to speak out aggressively against anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in the wake of riots in Paris in Fall 2005. Meyer said France actively supports ODIHR projects on Holocaust education, and pointed out that since these projects were introduced in schools and through French NGOs one year ago, anti-Semitic incidents there have decreased by 50 percent. She added that awareness raising is necessary to ensure that legitimate criticism of Israeli policy does not cross the line into anti-Semitism, which can lead to hate crimes and violence.

4. (SBU) Participants in the discussion agreed that the Danish cartoon controversy presents a good opportunity to raise concerns over the routine publication of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic cartoons in the Middle East and to involve OSCE's Mediterranean Partners in a dialogue on the importance of both tolerance and media freedom. At the end of the meeting, Weisskirchen said the German Foreign Ministry is considering holding an experts meeting on anti-Semitism in Berlin in mid-September 2006.

Meeting with Chancellery Adviser

5. (C) The cartoons controversy was also a topic of discussion in Congressman Wexler's meeting with Chancellor Schuessel's foreign policy adviser Hans Peter Manz. In response to a question from the Congressman on the effects of the cartoon controversy on European public opinion, Manz said that he did not think that the matter would increase sympathy for US policy in the Middle East, but he did think that it would make it more difficult for Arabs to play off differences between Europe and the U.S. Manz also stated that the organizing forces behind the controversy) he specifically mentioned Syria and Iran) have harmed their own interests as the controversy has escalated.

Congressman Wexler did not have an opportunity to clear this message before departure.

McCaw